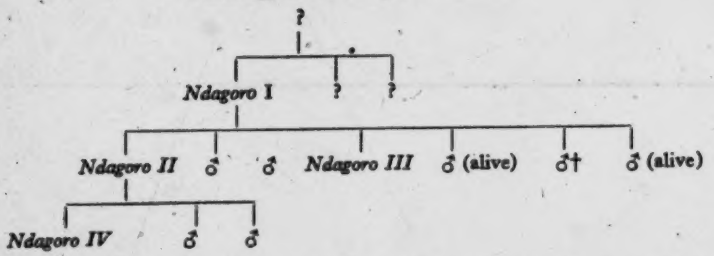
1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942

FF52 Nupe FF52

observe the general scheme of Nupe inheritance, one generation being run through before the next generation is admitted to the succession; but we notice also that the progress of succession left out two men of the older generation.

Genealogy of the *Ndagoro* of Mokwa



The same qualifications would also make a stranger who has settled for some time in a Nupe village eligible for a higher or lower *nūsa* rank. But 'good reputation' would be understood according to local standards, which may not be the standards of the applicant. A lute-player in Doko, who had been living there for some twenty years, a fairly prosperous and well-liked man, still went without title. Lute-playing, though appreciated in Bida, was not in the eyes of the villagers a respectable profession. Had he been a farmer, or even a drummer, he would have been awarded a title long before.

If a 'new man' desires to be granted a title he broaches the subject first with one of the titled *nūsa* with whom he is intimate; the latter will bring it before chief and council of elders, who will then discuss the question at their leisure. If, on the other hand, a rank falls vacant, especially one of the higher ranks, the official discussions will start at once, and all the men of the village will be talking about it and surmising likely successors. In the lowest ranks succession is a simple matter. In hereditary ranks, particularly in small families, the decision may also take but little time. When the *Ejukó* of Jebba Island—the hereditary Keeper of the Chain of Tsoede—died, his successor was known a week after his death, and the title was conferred upon him within a month. But sometimes the appointment of a successor is a serious and long-drawn-out business, and often enough, as we have seen, feuds may break out over the appointment of the most suitable candidate. Discussion follows discussion, often for weeks and months, especially if it happens to be the rainy season when everybody is busy and can spare only an evening or two in the week. The elders meet first, in small groups, in their own houses; later when the discussion has reached a more advanced stage they meet in the house of the *nūsa* of highest rank and finally in the house of the chief. As always in meetings of this kind the assembly gathers in the entrance hut of the house; the younger men sit near the outer door, the elder men on the inner side of the hut. They are rarely given anything to eat or drink except perhaps a few kola-nuts in the house of the chief.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

623 The meetings (which I have had many opportunities of attending) are quiet and dignified, the discussion flows slowly, no loud word is spoken; the young men are mostly silent, only the elder ones take part. If controversies or disagreements occur, they are never apparent in the discussion itself. Rather they reveal themselves in the disconcerting practice that what had seemed to be happily settled in one discussion will be questioned again in the next; and men whose agreement seemed to be successfully secured to-day will call another meeting of their own to-morrow or the next day and start the discussion all over again.

The appointment to a new rank is a matter of little ceremony. It is identical with the modest ceremonial that accompanies succession to the position of a family head (to be described in a later chapter) with which, in fact, it frequently coincides. Appointments to high *nūsa* ranks usually fall in the long period of mourning for the late holder of the rank, and so exclude any festivity or general celebration. Appointment to a new rank, which would mostly fall to a comparatively young man, is sometimes made the occasion of a little feasting: beer or palm-wine for the guests and a dance in the afternoon and evening to which neighbours, friends, and above all the comrades from the age-grade association are invited. But more often there is nothing; the selected candidate would be summoned to the chief's house before the assembled council of elders, and would be informed that *nw'a gi Tsowa*, 'he had been appointed (lit. had eaten) *Tsowa*', or some other such rank, and that is all. Only by the self-importance with which the new *nūsa* carries himself in the next few days or weeks will you be able to say that this had indeed been an important occasion. If by mistake you address him by his old title, he—or others who know—will put you right at once.

623 609 123 Perhaps I should mention that I have myself gone through this experience when the people of Jebba Island decided to bestow a rank on me, who had become in their eyes a 'full Nupe', and who at any rate was insisting on being treated as one when it came to religious meetings or confidential discussions of village matters. I had to make a few small presents (from which even a 'real' *nūsa*-candidate might not be exempted) to chief and elders; they were 'sitting' for three days, discussing the most suitable title, till eventually the senior *nūsa* informed me that I had been given the title *Shaba* (a very high rank but, needless to say, introduced *ad hoc*, and copied from the rank-list of other villages). A day or two after my appointment I walked through the village and met some people [576] who used the customary greeting for Europeans, *zaki*; but my companions called the people sharply to order, informing them that I was *Shaba* of Jebba now, which information at once elicited the greeting corresponding to the *Shaba* rank, *gbako nyenkpa* (body of iron). In a week or two there was nobody within ten miles of the place who did not know of my new rank.

CHIEFTAINSHIP

622 184 Chieftainship in Nupe is, like the system of *nūsa* ranks, characterized by the coexistence of two systems of succession:-promotion and hereditary succession. In Jebba and Mokwa the chief's rank is merely the

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

however, to give them up as soon as the former owner or his heir may return, even if he had been absent for a longer period than three years—the period of absence stipulated in the village. I have heard of no dispute that has ever arisen over these house-plots, either in the village or in Bida town.

Strangers as Settlers

From the land which the chief holds in trust he apportions land on request to strangers who come to settle in a Nupe village and equally, as we have seen, to natives of the village who, through long absence, have forfeited the claim to their family land. The procedure is the same for both. It is interesting to examine these regulations, especially because this form of granting land implies a previous adoption of the applicant into a local household. Generally speaking, the Nupe like strangers—respectable strangers—to settle in their villages. This fact reflects both the lack of pressure on the land and the attitude of a commercially highly developed country which is ready to welcome new citizens, very likely people who bring with them new techniques and new valuable knowledge.[1]

The stranger who decides to settle in a Nupe village will first stop for some time in the house of a family head, perhaps a friend, or friend of a relation, who is ready to accept him as a temporary member of the household. Be it a short or prolonged stay, strangers will never be expected to pay for their 'lodgings'. A small present of food or kola-nuts is the only compensation. The guest will keep his own *ménage*. But after a time he comes to be regarded as an adopted member of the house, and then it is time to make his request for land and a site for a house of his own. This request will always be done through the *emitsó*, the Owner of the House, who will bring the case of his guest to the notice of chief and elders. The *emitsó* will have to vouch for the character and reputation of the applicant—a bad reputation would invariably lead to a rejection of the application. The procedure (which varies slightly in different places) is this: a preliminary gift, called *emisa*, 'salute', consisting of ten to twenty kola-nuts, a fowl, a calabash of beer, or—more rarely—money, accompanies the formal request to the chief. Another gift of kola-nuts is made later to the chief's representative (one of the elders), who will go with the applicant to stake out the farm-plot and the site for the house, and who may become later an important witness if any dispute should arise. Now the new landowner sets to work. For two to three years he is exempted from tax. Then, when the crops have been good, he pays his first *dzankó*, not yet to the chief himself, but to the family head in whose

[1] We have mentioned evidence of this already, e.g. the Bornu settlers who have introduced onion-growing into Kutigi, or the Yoruba-Konú who introduced weaving and indigo dyeing in Yoruba fashion. At the hearing of a court case—it was a rather involved dispute over a house in Kacha that had been 'sold' by the late owner in order to obtain money for tax arrears (the only case of this kind that has ever come to my notice), as a result of which his widow had now no place to go to—the *Etsu*'s Court officially recommended that 'strangers should always be adopted into one's household and given a hut to live in'.

1: Nadel E-5 (1934-1936) 1942
FF52 Nupe FF52

house he had been staying before, and the latter returns half of the gift to the chief. The next *dzankd* will be the ordinary land-tax of every member of the village community, presented to the chief directly. Today the first part of the procedure has remained unchanged, except that the application (and sometimes the presents as well) may also be addressed to the District Head.[1] But the annual *dzankd* is now replaced by the Government tax.

The grant of land to strangers never includes the trees growing on the farm-land. They remain the property of the village chief or the other native inhabitants, and this makes the analogy between strangers and adopted household members full: for like the strangers junior family members cannot own trees, although they hold land of their own.[2]

Access to Family Land

This question will be examined in detail later, and no more than a short summary is needed here. Three methods regulate the access of the individual member of the family group to the family land held jointly by the group and administered by the family head. (1) Temporary and restricted access to this land is embodied in the right of every male member, boys as well as adults, to a small plot of his own, which he can work independently. Such plots are called *bucá*, and the individual work on the plots is called *bucá* work. (2) Adult male members of the family group, who have already founded a family of their own, may claim a large farm of the kind that is worked jointly by a number of family members. This farm and farm-work is called *efakó*. (3) The fullest access to family land is embodied in inheritance and in the succession to the position of family head. This position implies control over all family land that the family head holds in his hands. The first two forms of access are 'family affairs' arranged without any formality; the last transaction implies, as we have seen, a formal reference to the chief. The chief's control over the occupied village land is thus made conspicuous not with respect to land that is apportioned on a small scale to individuals for direct use, but with respect to the land that is to be held in trust for future distribution by the new family head. The chief, in other words, as he is bound himself to trusteeship, guarantees the trusteeship undertaken by others. The analogy in the position of chief and family head with respect to land is clearly recognized by the Nupe. Both are heads of corporate groups, and both administrators of the joint rights vested in the groups. Both, moreover, hold the same special, economically significant, right to trees.

[1] I am not sure if this is really prescribed by the regulations. I know that in Agaie Emirate all peasants thought it was. In any case it would save a lot of trouble, should disputes arise later, if one had the District Head for a witness of the original transaction.

[2] This rule also holds good with respect to large groups of alien settlers. In Kutigi, for example, it led to the anomalous position that the Benu settlers, although they had become the political rulers of the community and supplied the chief of 'Greater Kutigi', owned no trees at all in the beginning, and still own very much less than the family heads of the *kintsoši*, the Owners of the Land, that is, the original inhabitants.